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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 004243

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SUBJECT: ANC CONFERENCE: CHAOTIC, DISORGANIZED, AND
DEMOCRATIC

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Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Perry Ball. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In spite of innumerable logistical problems and delays, the ANC's 52nd national conference ended successfully with voters clearly choosing Jacob Zuma as ANC President in a transparent and democratic process. Allegations of vote-buying circulated throughout the conference, but voting delegates appeared immune as results largely mirrored those from the provincial nominations process almost a month ago. Not one delegate PolOff spoke to had any complaints about how the process was run. Conference dynamics differed drastically from previously orchestrated ANC conferences where positions went uncontested, marking an important step in the development of the ANC as a political party. END SUMMARY.

LOGISTICS NOT ANC'S STRONG SUIT

12. (C) The 52nd African National Conference (ANC) was plagued with logistical problems from start to finish. Conference registration began on 15 December at an airport hangar, which was leaking with rain, outside Polokwane, Limpopo. PolOff arrived to find a large group of screaming delegates demanding that security guards let them through the gate to the hangar. After being jostled for about 15 minutes, PolOff entered when those in the front shoved their way through the gate. PolOff observed this pattern of delegates waiting, becoming irritated, and then taking matters into their own hands throughout the afternoon. No one manned the diplomatic registration desk. The international guest desk was staffed by two people eating pizza in front of a computer that was not plugged in who had no advice for PolOff on what to do or where to go. Many diplomats, including PolOff, and delegates did not have badges waiting for them (despite the 12 November deadline for pre-registration) or had badges with someone else's photograph mistakenly affixed to them. Security was strict about requiring badges and PolOff had to wait at several checkpoints for contacts to come and escort her through to the conference. PolOff eventually received two identical badges within a half hour of each other near the end of the second day.

13. (C) Actual conference proceedings for the 7,000 attendees were held in a tent in the middle of a muddy field (it rained for the duration of the conference) at the University of Limpopo, located in a township 30 km outside of Polokwane. A

large food tent for government and international guests was set up about a 10-minute walk away. Delegates were supposed to eat at their dormitories on campus, but after food ran out the first day, delegates decided to come to the international food tent, causing a constant shortage of food. In a particularly awkward moment, delegates at Poloff's table conversationally blamed the lack of food on international guests, looking pointedly at PolOff who was eating a buttered hamburger bun for lunch.

¶4. (C) According to the program, voting for the top six positions was to occur the evening of 16 December after official delegate numbers were verified and presented in the form of a credentials report. However, conference delegates and guests attending the first day's sessions were dismissed around 11pm on the 16th without any mention of voting. During the following afternoon, an emergency steering QDuring the following afternoon, an emergency steering committee meeting was called to approve the credentials report, bringing the entire conference to a standstill for almost an hour.

¶5. (C) Public Works Minister Thoko Didiza finally presented the report and apologized for the delay, blaming "IT problems that caused us to manually tabulate delegates using a master list." Delegates were told they would be able to vote starting at 6am the following morning (Tuesday, 18 December). Again, however, logistical problems forced voting to be delayed by almost four hours. A British diplomat heard there was a problem with the computer that scanned badges, ANC Researcher Wande Makalima told PolOff that ballot paper arrived late (from where he did not know), a French diplomat heard that ballot boxes arrived late, and a European Commission diplomat spoke to an election official who acted surprised that voting was supposed to have begun at 6am, thinking instead it was scheduled for 9am.

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DELEGATES UNRULY, BUT NEVER VIOLENT

¶6. (C) Delays during the first day were largely attributable to outbursts from Zuma's supporters, who constantly burst into song, stomped on the floor, danced on chairs, and loudly booed when cameras showed anyone in Mbeki's camp on the large-screen TVs. However, Zuma supporters were never violent. In fact, PolOff received numerous, random hugs walking around campus by Zuma supporters who were either so happy in their confidence that Zuma would win or so relieved when he did. Mbeki supporters, however, saw their behavior differently. Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister and NEC member Sue van der Merwe told PolOff that the conference was overrun by "hooligans."

¶7. (C) Then-ANC Chairperson and current Defense Minister "Terror" Lekota did a terrible job running the conference program, and it was obvious by pro-Zuma delegates' repeated use of the soccer hand signal for player substitution that they had lost all respect for him. Lekota appeared completely unfazed, all the while giving the impression he had never run a meeting before. At one point, while he was trying to run through conference rules, he said, "I don't want to hear from anyone else who disagrees! The motion has already been agreed to once, now I need someone else to second the motion!" Delegates never accepted this type of partisan behavior and corrected him numerous times on official ANC rules. After particularly unproductive sessions, then Secretary General, now Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe would stand up and get everyone settled down and in agreement in less than two minutes. (NOTE: In the run-up to the election, Lekota publicly and repeatedly criticized the behavior of Zuma supporters. As a result, he lost the race for ANC Chairman and was not reelected to the National Executive Committee. END NOTE.)

18. (C) During the second day, Zuma supporters were much better disciplined. One delegate told PolOff that they were afraid that President Mbeki and his supporters were going to use their unruliness as a way to cancel the election. Zuma supporters heeded their camp's advice and kept their singing and dancing to a minimum. In contrast, Mbeki supporters, who were silent most of the first day, tried their best to show their loyalty by singing and chanting but their numbers were so small -- only a portion of Eastern Cape -- it seemed almost counterproductive. After results were announced on the third day, pro-Zuma supporters were obviously over-the-moon, but never seemed to flaunt it aggressively at other delegates, not that there was a need given the landslide victory.

VOTING PROCESS ULTIMATELY DEMOCRATIC

19. (C) Accusations of vote-buying and intimidation circulated widely throughout the conference hall until the ANC announced the results for the top six on 18 December. One delegate from Western Cape told PolOff that Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka came to his town and literally "opened her boot up," implying the trunk of her car was full of money. He also said he was told by Mbeki lobbyists that he "would not have to work another day in his life if he voted for Mbeki." As a result, Zuma supporters were worried that vote-counting would be manipulated. The Electoral Commission tried numerous times to explain that electronic counting was reliable and that it would take too long to hand-count, but Zuma's supporters, particularly the ANC Youth League, never backed down and the Electoral Commission eventually gave in and hand-counted all ballots. Complaints that Mbeki lobbyists had been demanding those they bribed to offer proof of their vote in the form of a cell phone photo of their marked ballot also were widespread. In the end, cell phones were banned from the voting booths, making Zuma supporters elated.

110. (C) PolOff talked to voting delegates, who ranged from educated professionals to uneducated rural councillors, as they were coming out of the voting booth. Everyone, without exception, was elated that they had the opportunity to vote. Some delegates had waited more than six hours in line, but not one seemed put out. Everyone said that voting was orderly and voting delegates were polite to one another. Security guards checked everyone before going into the voting stations and retained cell phones until the voter was ready

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to depart. Voters were directed to voting booths according to their province or league and thumbs were marked with indelible ink to prevent double voting.

COMMENT

111. (C) This ANC conference was a watershed moment for the party in that it was not a typically scripted ANC election conference, where positions go uncontested and "outbursts" are carefully orchestrated. Many disciplined Mbeki supporters seemed to have a hard time accepting this. The demand by delegates to be heard is a sign that the party is moving from a revolutionary movement to a "normal" political party whose constituents have competing interests. Despite delegates' fears that there would be attempts to alter or massage the results, ANC structures showed clear responsiveness to members throughout the conference. Lekota may have done a terrible job at managing the delegates, but everyone was allowed to speak, even when it meant hearing the same opinion over and over again. The organizers acquiesced when it was clear that delegates were not going to accept a

certain decision, as was the case over hand-counting the ballots. While the ANC has always said it speaks for the people, the national conference proceedings demonstrated laudable internal accountability.

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